

Written Testimony of Representative Jim Langevin (RI-02)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 4: The Future of American Manufacturing & Skills Training

Mr. Hoyer, thank you for convening today's hearing and for your steadfast dedication to rebuilding our nation's manufacturing sector.

Today, I would like to touch on a topic that not only affects my home state of Rhode Island, but also has broader economic implications for our nation: the Skills gap. I hear a constant refrain from employers that despite their numerous job openings, they are unable to find employees with the necessary skills to fill them. This gap is a persistent drag on our economy, but it is one that we have the tools to fix.

As co-chair of the bipartisan Career and Technical Education Caucus, alongside Mr. Thompson of Pennsylvania, I have made the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act one of my top priorities. The Perkins Act is a major federal funding source for career and technical education in high schools, career and tech centers and community and technical colleges that support skills training. And it is my hope that we can work in a bipartisan manner to pass a strong reauthorization of Perkins before the end of this Congress.

Ultimately, the success of any skills training program lies in an employer-educator partnership. Students need to be aware of the skills necessary to succeed in their chosen field, and they need to visualize the potential opportunities available to them. The emphasis on in-demand skills cannot be overstated, and the easiest way to ensure that training matches workplace needs is to make sure that employers and school systems are working hand-in-hand to train the future workforce.

One of the most effective means to expand coordination between employers and educators is through the use of apprenticeships. While these programs are uncommon in the United States, they have enjoyed longtime and widespread acceptance in Europe, particularly in Switzerland and Germany. In fact, two-thirds of Swiss students and 60% of Germans are finding their careers through an apprenticeship.

Earlier this month, I hosted a CTE Caucus field hearing in Rhode Island. Business and educational leaders were briefed by experts from German and Swiss industry as to how their apprenticeship models work, and how they are most effectively adapted to the United States.

The success of these programs lies in strong buy-in from local businesses. We need to make sure that Perkins provides support to companies so that offering apprenticeships becomes a viable business strategy. Community colleges, likewise, need the flexibility to accommodate these apprentices and offer classes that fit into the schedule of a full-time employee. With the proper level of engagement and the right set of policies in place, these partnerships can be a true catalyst for workforce development.

Thank you again for convening today's hearing. The skills gap is a large problem, but it is certainly one that we can solve. I look forward to working with everyone in this room and beyond to ensure that all Americans have the training to be college- and career-ready.